

6-3-1940

## UA3/2/4 Confederate Memorial Day

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### Recommended Citation

Garrett, Paul, "UA3/2/4 Confederate Memorial Day" (1940). *WKU Archives Records*. Paper 7131.  
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Confederate Memorial Day--Bowling Green Cemetery  
1940

I am honored by the invitation to speak to you on this occasion when our minds turn from the cares of the busy day which engross them to a consideration of the brevity of life and the qualities in those who rest here which make them worthy of emulation and remembrance. It seems to me good that we come in these days of world crisis to this quiet place to gather if it may be a lesson for our own guidance from contemplation of the past in which these our honored dead struggled for what they judged the right.

We have not time today to consider at length the causes of the great conflict in which they fought whom we gather today to honor and yet I think it well that we recall briefly the setting for the struggle for the sake of a new generation which may falsely conclude that there was no issue and that the South fought a war without any defensible cause.

Let us recall that our government in its origin was a union of sovereign states and so regarded by both North and South as is evidenced by statements and proposals from time to time by leading statesmen of both areas to the effect that nullification of national law by state action was a possibility and that secession from the union was a right inherent in its organization. Quite logical was the answer that the rights of nullification and secession if possessed by the individual states made efficient functioning by the national government impossible, but the logic of the answer could not alter the fact that no national constitution could ever have been adopted had there been a requirement that the states subscribing should surrender these rights.

We have only time to mention the gradual increase in lack of understanding between the two sections as a result of an increasing difference in systems of

labor, in political ideas, in religious beliefs, and in social customs. The divergent opinions of Webster and of Calhoun were after all honest opinions and there was no tribunal which could reconcile them save war.

The right to hold slaves was recognized and guaranteed by the constitution. The originally powerful sentiment in the South against slavery gradually changed to a determined championship of the institution as a result of an honest if mistaken idea that after the invention of the cotton gin the economic welfare of the South depended on slavery, as a result of the inability of the South to visualize a safe society with freed slaves as members, and as a result of the natural and human response to the ruthless and fanatical and unconstitutional attitude of the extreme abolitionists. The rapidly increasing population of the North made the securing of constitutional rights in Congress increasingly hopeless and the determination of the North that slave territory should not be extended was matched by an equal determination on the part of the South that the Southerner should be privileged to enjoy additions to the national domain while in full possession of all his property. I do not need to remind you of the failure of the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the Dred Scott Decision to solve the question. This difference of opinion was not to be reconciled in Congress. Surrender of honest conviction was equally impossible. And so war came.

The sense of loyalty to one's state rather than to the Union is well illustrated by Alexander H. Stephens, Vice President of the



Confederacy, who personally opposed to secession yet went with his state and perhaps better still by Robert E. Lee, who believed little in slavery and less in secession, yet refused the offer to command the army of the Union to enter the service of his beloved state. Not "my country right or wrong," but my state right or wrong was his decision; and in his decision you find a basis for understanding the fundamental disagreement which could find no peaceful solution.

And so from the big plantation and from the small farm, from behind the counter and from the mill, from the law office and from the class room thronged these men and boys of the South to fight for what seemed to them to be the righteous cause of states rights and of liberty.

There followed Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Nashville, and Appomattox.

What names come to mind. Joseph E. Johnston, Albert S. Johnston, Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart, Robert E. Lee are but a few of the gallant leaders who led their poorly clad and provisioned but courageous men against invincible odds. Vainly we might strive to do justice to the valor of the members of the armies in gray and of the self-sacrificing and indomitable women at home through four years of ever-increasing hardship, and deprivation, and want.

In the end the issues of slavery and secession were decided. The Union was preserved to the end that the children and grandchildren of those who fought might be citizens of a more glorious nation than ever

could have resulted from a Southern victory, and we of the South yield to none in our allegiance to it. As Henry Watterson expressed it at the dedication of a Confederate monument in Nashville in 1904, "We are to make no paltry admissions, no mean confessions, no dishonoring renunciations; but standing uncovered in the presence of Almighty God, proclaiming to the world the integrity of the dead, signaling the cause for which they died, renewing our allegiance to the sacred compact of brotherhood and soldiership, we are to reconcile this act of pious homage with perfect loyalty to the Union, to the flag, and to those of our countrymen who fought against us."

The bitterness of the war and even of the evil days of reconstruction is past. The hopelessness of the last verse of the "Conquered Banner"

"Furl that banner, softly slowly!  
Treat it gently--it is holy,  
For it droops above the dead.  
Touch it not--unfold it never;  
Let it droop there; furled forever,--  
For its peoples hopes are fled!"

is no longer true of the new South, but we can still say with Father Ryan,

"Furl that banner! True 'tis gory,  
Yet 'tis wreathed around with glory,  
And 'twill live in song and story  
Though its folds are in the dust!  
For its fame on brightest pages,  
Penned by poets and by sages,  
Shall go sounding down the ages--  
Furl its folds though now we must!"

and our hearts respond to the sentiment of Finch,

"No more shall the war cry sever  
Or the winding rivers be red.  
They banish our anger forever  
When they laurel the graves of our dead.  
Under the sod and the dew  
Waiting the judgment day,  
Love and tears for the blue,  
Tears and love for the gray."